

MEDIA READY PRINT STORY

Provided by the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force

"Committing Sexual Assault is a Crime and a Choice."

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It is not a misunderstanding, miscommunication, or an accident – it is sexual assault. And committing sexual assault is a crime and a choice. The Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force is kicking off a statewide billboard and poster campaign to highlight that sexual assault is a crime that individuals choose to commit, not an unintentional or inadvertent act. The campaign coincides with Sexual Assault Awareness Month, which is observed nationwide throughout the month of April, and Crime Victims Rights Awareness Week, April 13-19.

The campaign will also illuminate the types of crimes that sexual assault encompasses, such as harassment, voyeurism, exposing, and grabbing. These crimes have historically been seen as nuisance (or petty) crimes but are now recognized as continuum crimes, crimes which may denote a pattern of escalating sexually criminal behavior.

Unfortunately, when we hear about incidents of sexual assault we often hear about the choices or behavior of the victim which are believed to have put her at risk. While individuals *may* be able to *reduce their risk* of being sexually assaulted they cannot prevent sexual assault. Focusing on the victim diverts attention from the individual who is actually responsible, the individual who chooses to commit the sexual assault or rape.

Moreover, because sexual assault most commonly occurs between individuals who know each other, typical risk reduction strategies, like walking in well lit areas, keeping your doors locked, or avoiding drinks from a stranger, are not likely to apply. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, nearly 9 out of 10 rapes or sexual assaults involve a single offender who had a prior relationship with the victim as a family member, intimate partner or acquaintance.ⁱ

Even more striking is the extent to which a relatively small group of individuals commit a large number of sexual crimes. In one study, 63% of identified sex offenders committed an average of 5.7 criminal sexual offenses each. The 122 sex offenders identified in the study self-reported committing 386 rapes in addition to 365 acts of child sexual abuse.ⁱⁱ

Perhaps the most alarming data comes from Bureau of Justice Statistics survey which suggests that the approximately 265,000 convicted sex offenders under the authority of corrections agencies in the U.S. represent less than 10% of all sex offenders living in communities nationwide.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is with this data in mind that the Task Force has embarked on a billboard and poster campaign intended to raise awareness about sexual assault and increase offender accountability. Billboards will be displayed at various locations around the state and posters will be sent out to agencies who serve crime victims and survivors of sexual assault. For more information visit www.oregonsatf.org.

ⁱ Greenfeld, L. (1997). *Sex Offenses and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault*. Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

ⁱⁱ Lisak D. and Miller, P. "Repeat Rape and Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists." *Violence and Victims*, v17, n1, 2002.

ⁱⁱⁱ Greenfeld, L. (1997).